

Public Safety Answering Points Plan, Municipal Assessments Plan, and Priority Regional Opportunities for CRCOG

Background

In response to CT OPM Secretary McCaw's instruction and conditions for the fourth quarter payment of the Regional Services Grant, CRCOG is submitting a plan for the following:

- Consolidation of Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs);
- Establishing a phase-in approach to municipal assessment; and
- Implementing your CRCOG's top three (3) priorities.

CRCOG is incorporating the entirety of CTCOG's Report regarding Public Safety Answering Points and Municipal Assessment as part of its plan and response to Secretary McCaw's request.

Overview

CRCOG has been a regional leader in providing regional opportunities and services to CRCOG member towns and other municipalities within the state of Connecticut. CRCOG's Cooperative Purchasing organization, the CRCOG Regional Purchasing Council, boasts 111 members. CRCOG's IT Services Cooperative which encompasses many services, has 61 participating towns, and CRCOG's Job Order Contracting program recently surpassed \$50 million in projects. In addition, CRCOG has undertaken initiatives (either with state grants or of CRCOG's own initiative), including the www.nutmeghr.org portal which provides municipalities with a variety of Human Resources related resources; the Electronic Document Management System, which recently launched into program mode, and the Cybersecurity initiative, which provides municipalities with assessment and remediation opportunities as well as model municipal cybersecurity policies. Moreover, CRCOG is the fiduciary for DEMHS Region 3 Homeland Security funds and has been for more than 15 years. Each of CRCOG's Programs add value and create efficiencies for our municipalities.

In FY 2017-2018 as part of its strategic planning, CRCOG conducted a survey of its members to gauge interest in various regional programs. Both Public Service Answering Points (PSAPs) and Regional Assessment were topics discussed in that survey. In 2019-2020 CRCOG conducted a benchmarking study of municipal assessment against similar sized counties with similar assessment schedules and requirements. In addition to other resources, the plan of those potential projects will reference the 2017-2018 survey of CRCOG members as well as the 2019-2020 benchmarking study.

Plan to Regionalize Public Safety Answering Points

The CRCOG region has a combination of some consolidated PSAPs (either regional or multi-town) and some standalone PSAPs. Twenty-two of CRCOG members are standalone PSAPs and 16 are either consolidated with another municipality or part of a regional PSAPs. It is important to note that of the CRCOG members that are part of regional PSAPs or multi-town PSAPs many cross current COG borders.

Challenges to Consolidation

It is important to note that if any savings are realized from PSAP consolidation, there will not be a corresponding reduction in state taxes. The 911-surcharge on phone bills could be reduced as a result, but because PSAPs are not funded by state tax revenue, more efficient and effective PSAPs will not result in tax reductions or state expense reductions.

The CTCOG plan clearly lays out challenges for PSAP regionalization.

CRCOG and Regional PSAPs

CRCOG's survey from 2017-2018 of its members for potential regional services showed the Regional Dispatch Centers (along with Regional prison Holding Cells where that may become necessary with some dark stations) ranked the lowest of all the projects proposed. In addition, within CRCOG's Public Safety committees and groups, opposition to Regional PSAPs run high.

Councils of Governments, by their nature, are in a challenging position regarding PSAP consolidation. The COG's primary constituents are the member municipalities and COG's are primarily planning organizations, not operational organizations. Moreover, many of the current regional PSAPs cross current COG boundaries. Finally, CRCOG's regional initiatives are all based on a voluntary participation model. Effective consolidation of PSAPs would make a complete voluntary participation model very hard to implement.

CRCOG believes the COGs can act as educators and supporters of Regional PSAPs but by their very nature and the primary constituents and expertise, CRCOG believes the ultimate consolidators and actors in implementing regional PSAPs must be the state working with the COGs, municipalities and appropriate stakeholders to create Regional PSAP authorities.

CRCOG Planned Activities for 2021-2022

The CTCOG plan shows potential paths for the way forward. CRCOG does have specific activities planned for the CRCOG region.

In its support of Regional PSAPs, in FY 2021-2022 CRCOG will conduct the following:

- Survey membership in understanding needs and attitudes for Regional PSAPs. This survey would encompass Chief Elected Officials, Chief Administrative Officers, Chiefs of Police and Fire and any other stakeholders.
- Create a preliminary executive summary that outlines investments and goals necessary for regionalization of PSAPs

Plan for Regional Municipal Property Assessment

CTCOG’s report regarding Municipal Assessment covers CRCOG’s activities and plans. The following outlines planned CRCOG specific undertakings for FY 21-22

CRCOG’s Previous Activities Regarding Municipal Property Assessment

As part of its Municipal Services Workplan, in 2019-2020 CRCOG undertook a benchmark study of the region’s assessment. Specifically, the benchmark study compared the CRCOG region with Hennepin County, MN and Pima County, AZ, both which assess personal property (an important role in assessments in Connecticut). The comparison was not truly apples to apples primarily because motor vehicle appraisal is conducted by the state in both those counties. The study showed that there was potential for cost efficiency, but when motor vehicle property is considered, CRCOG towns appear to be at least as efficient if not more efficient than the other two counties.

A 2014 IAAO Study: Staffing Assessment Study in Canada and U.S. showed that the Average FTE per office is 15 with a median of 5. CRCOG average is 3. In addition, the Average Parcel per FTE is 3,123. CRCOG is 2,590 –3,053, slightly below average. The IAAO Study, however, does not consider personal property appraisals in its average parcel per FTE.

CRCOG’s Plan for Regional Property Assessment

Based on the base benchmark study, CRCOG proposes to conduct the following in FY 21-22. The CRCOG’s Benchmark Study in 2019-2020 was at a very high level regarding CRCOG’s individual town’s assessments. In 2021-2022 CRCOG will:

- Undertake an inventory of CRCOG’s assessment practices:
 - As noted in the CTCOG report, there are variations across towns on how assessment and revaluations are conducted (data mailers, required visual inspection, etc.). CRCOG will undertake an inventory of each CRCOG municipality to document and understand how practices vary.
 - Inventory office hours: One of the issues with the smaller towns have anecdotally been the lack of availability of the part-time assessor. CRCOG will inventory each municipality’s assessor office hours.

- The inventory above will guide CRCOG in determining the next steps necessary for regionalization including any standardization that may be needed to assist in that process as well as the small towns that could be interested in participating in shared assessment to increase their service hours. CRCOG's Opportunity Areas for Future Regionalization

Regional Priority Areas

CRCOG submitted areas of priority in its December 2019 report. This is an update on those areas and additional areas CRCOG is focusing on regarding regionalization.

Update on December 2019 Report Areas

On-Call Human Resources

Many small towns have a need for human resources assistance. They are not large enough to have a human resources person on staff, however, they have human resources issues or need assistance in various human resources areas. In spring of 2020, CRCOG created a program for its small towns for Human Resources on-call consultants. This program has been up and running since May of 2020 and although CRCOG will increase promotion of the program, CRCOG believes this need can now be met through CRCOG's new program.

Electronic Document Management System (EDMS) Program Expansion

CRCOG's current EDMS program launched into program phase in October of 2020. The current program includes agenda management, HR File management, and Land Use documents. CRCOG continues to work towards expanding the program to enable more municipalities to take advantage of this resource. CRCOG considers the EDMS program to be one of many resources available to municipalities across Connecticut.

School/Town Back Office Consolidation Assistance to Towns

CRCOG submitted a Regional Performance Incentive Program Grant proposal to create School/Town Back Office Consolidation templates for the towns. Some CRCOG members have already consolidated this area, and this is of high interest for some of our members. CRCOG still believes a program to assist towns in implementing school/town back-office consolidation could enable towns to realize efficiencies within the municipalities. Given municipal and member interest, CRCOG will continue to explore avenues to assist towns in this area.

Consistent High Resolution State-wide Orthographic Aerial Acquisition (every 4 to 5 years)

CRCOG continues to strongly advocate for consistent state-wide high-resolution aerial acquisitions every 4 to 5 years. This would be a benefit to the state and all regions and should be a consistent part of the state's budget.

Additional Areas of Activity in 2020-2021

In addition to the priority areas outlined above, and the COVID-19 support areas outlined in the CTCOG report, CRCOG has used the Regional Services Grant funding for a variety of shared and regional services. Some of those services and programs are as follows:

Capitol Region Purchasing Council

- Annual Bids (up to 20 bids per year)
- Energy Consortia (Reverse Auctions for Electricity completed in 2020)
- eziQC (Job Order Contracting – bid completed in October 2020)

IT Services Cooperative

- Regional Online Permitting
- Fiber Infrastructure (SERTEX)
- General IT Services (Novus Insights)
- CRCOG Data Center (includes Hosting Services / Disaster Recovery)
- Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP)
- Cybersecurity Program (Services and Model Policies)
- Time and Attendance Software

HR-Portal

- Salary Survey and Reporting Module
- Model Documents
- Sample Document Library
- Interview Panel

Solid Waste/Materials Management RFP's or RFI's

- Textile Recycling
- Curbside Textile Recycling (planning stages in 2020-2021)
- Curbside Food waste Pick-up (planning stages in 2020-2021)

Other On-Going Programs

- Regional Online GIS System

Public Safety and Security Related Programs

- Support of the Capitol Region Citizen Corps Council and its Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT)
- Support of Capitol Region Emergency Planning Council and its Emergency Support Functions (ESF's)
- Regional Cybersecurity Task Force

Transportation and Planning Related Programs

- Land use zoning referrals
- Software for scenario planning and other transportation planning

Statutorily Required Areas

- Human Services Coordinating Council
- Regional election monitor

Priority Areas for 2021-2022

CRCOG continues to explore ways to make municipalities more efficient in their back-end processes.

Regional Job Portal

One area of recent request in helping our members was a regional on-line job-application portal. The regional on-line job application portal would serve as a central point where applicants could apply to multiple municipalities and allow smaller towns without on-line application ability to be able to offer an on-line application to applicants. CRCOG will work with interested towns to offer this as a potential area of expansion of nutmeghr.org.

Expansion of Purchasing Council, IT Services and Shared Services

CRCOG has robust offerings in its commodity bids, energy consortium, IT services and other service areas. CRCOG will explore opportunities to offer additional commodities and services as well as expanding usage of current programs.

School/Town Back Office Consolidation Assistance to Towns

School/Town back-office consolidation continues to be an area of interest by many CRCOG members. CRCOG will continue to work with its interested members to find avenues for furthering school/town back-office consolidation.